

ANCIENT
CHINESE

FABLES



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TRANSLATED BY
YANG HSIEN-YI AND GLADYS YANG

ILLUSTRATIONS BY
FENG TSE-KAI

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FOREWORD

CHANG YU-LUAN

In ancient Chinese literature we find many fables. They have lived on for hundreds of years in men's hearts and, constantly on their lips, have become a precious part of our national heritage.

The golden age of Chinese fables was during the third and the fourth century B.C.

This was the era in Chinese history usually known as the Warring States Period, when society was undergoing rapid changes. Influenced by the spirit of the age, many different schools of thought flourished, resulting in great advances in culture and philosophy. The heritage of the past was studied, summarized, and recorded for posterity, and in these records some of the best and oldest fables were preserved.

Many works dating from the Warring States Period embody fables, outstanding examples being Lieh Tzu, Chuang Tzu, Mencius, Yin Wen Tzu, Han Fei Tzu, The Discourses of Lü Pu-wei and the Warring States Anecdotes.

During that period, fables proved extremely useful weapons in debate. Outstanding philosophers, politicians, or orators who wished to realize their ideals by political means were expert in using them. Since they belonged to different schools of thought and had different political aims,

there were constant clashes between them; therefore to gain their ends they made speeches, engaged in debates, and set down their views in writing. And, realizing that abstract ideas alone were not sufficient to defeat their rivals, they used fables to give substance to their thoughts and to prove the validity of their arguments. Thus most of the fables of the Warring States Period are interspersed among philosophic and political writings, which they illuminate.

This being the case, the fables of this period, whether written to elucidate certain ideas or to praise or censure specific actions, all have a definite purpose.

And yet, the ideas, characters and incidents in these fables have universal validity. For instance, when Mencius told the story of the chicken thief he had a particular example in mind, a certain minister of the state of Sung who would not put an end to unreasonable taxation; but the moral applies to all those who see their own mistakes yet refuse to mend their ways. Similarly, "The Fox Who Profited by the Tiger's Might" was used by Chiang Yi, a minister of the state of Chu, to criticize another minister. Later generations, however, have used this tale to describe those who rely on the power of others to oppress the people.

This collection of ancient fables, broadly speaking, consists of those which are still in current use today in China. They are only a fraction of those written during the Warring States Period. There are many other ancient fables, embedded in classical works, which have been forgotten, but those presented here have stood the test of time.

The people not only know how to select good fables, but also how to use them. Many ancient fables which were originally used by the rulers for their own ends have been cleverly readapted to serve society as a whole. For example, Chuang Tzu wrote "The Tomtit and the Giant Roc" to show that all things must follow their predestined course and

behave according to their nature. The giant roc could fly high; but since the tomtit was unable to do so, it should fly low and be contented with its lot. This was encouraging men to be passive and think it futile to struggle. However, this fable is usually interpreted as meaning that petty-minded creatures cannot understand the great, and is directed against those who are too short-sighted to appreciate the high ideals of others, and who think their own small world is everything. Such individuals are like the tomtit confronted with the giant roc. Again, "Three Chestnuts or Four" was used by Lieh Tzu to advise his sovereign how to deceive his subjects, and the writer commented: "A sagacious ruler in his wisdom can control the ignorant rabble just as the man in this story controlled the monkeys." But posterity took this fable to mean that "the change of a name does not mean that a thing is changed"; and if men realize this, they will not be cheated by their rulers. From such examples we can see the skill with which the people transformed base metal into gold.

While fables reached a high stage of development in China during the third and the fourth century B.C., it was not until much later that they came to be regarded as a special literary form, and many authors wrote fables as such. But since this collection is restricted to ancient fables, we shall not deal here with later developments in this form of literature.

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THE TOMTIT AND THE GIANT ROC

THERE was once a bird called the roc, whose back was as vast as Mount Tai and whose wings were like clouds that overspread the heavens. When it wheeled up into the air a whirlwind arose, and in each flight it covered ninety thousand li,* soaring above the misty vapours under the azure sky. Once it was flying southwards to the Southern Ocean.

"Where can it be going?" wondered a tomtit with a laugh. "I leap up scores of feet, then come down to enjoy myself among the bushes. That's good enough for me. Where else does it want to go?"

Here we see the difference in outlook between great and small.

Chuang Tzu**

THE OINTMENT FOR CHAPPED HANDS

A FAMILY in the state of Sung made an excellent ointment for chapped hands; so for generations they engaged in laundering. A man who heard of this offered a hundred pieces of gold for their recipe.

* A li is approximately one-third of a mile.

** The teachings of Chuang Tzu (Chuang Chou), who lived in the third or fourth century B.C. A part of this book is believed to be the work of later writers.

"We have been in the laundry trade for generations," said this family as they discussed the matter. "But we never made more than a few pieces of gold. Today we can sell our recipe for a hundred pieces. By all means let us sell it."

Now the state of Yueh was invading the state of Wu, and having bought the recipe this man presented it to the Prince of Wu, who thereupon made him a general. His troops fought a naval action with those of Yueh that winter, and completely routed the enemy. Then the prince made him a noble, rewarding him with a fief.

Thus the same ointment for chaps could win a fief or simply aid laundrymen.

All depends upon the use to which things are put.

Chuang Tzu

THE BIRD KILLED BY KINDNESS

A sea-gull alighted in a suburb of the capital of Lu. The Marquis of Lu welcomed it and feasted it in the temple hall, ordering the best music and grandest sacrifices for it. But the bird remained in a daze, looking quite wretched, not daring to swallow a morsel of meat or a single cup of wine. And after three days it died.

This was entertaining the sea-gull as the Marquis of Lu liked to be entertained, not as a sea-gull likes to be entertained.

Chuang Tzu

LEARNING THE WRONG THING

BECAUSE Hsi Shih, the famous beauty, suffered from heartburn, she would often frown in front of all the neighbours.

An ugly girl in the same village, who noticed this and thought it very charming, also put her hands to her breast and frowned in front of everyone. When the rich saw her, they barred their doors and would not come out. As for the poor, they ran away, taking their wives and children.

Poor thing! She could admire Hsi Shih's frown, but did not know why it was beautiful.

Chuang Tzu



THE ART OF CARVING DRAGONS

CHU Ping-man went to Chih-li Yi to learn how to carve dragons for the table. He studied for three years and spent all his very considerable property before he mastered the subject.

But he never found a dragon on which to practise his art.

Chuang Tzu

HOW TWO SHEPHERD BOYS LOST THEIR SHEEP

TWO shepherd boys, Ku and Tsang, went out together with their flocks and both of them lost their sheep. When their master asked Tsang what he had been doing, he answered that he had been reading. When Ku was questioned, he said he had been playing draughts.

They were doing different things, yet they both lost their sheep just the same.

Chuang Tzu

THE FROG IN THE WELL

A FROG lived in a shallow well.

"Look how well off I am here!" he told a big turtle from the Eastern Ocean. "I can hop along the coping of the well when I go out, and rest by a crevice in the bricks on my return. I can wallow to my heart's content with only my head above water, or stroll ankle deep through soft mud. No crabs or tadpoles can compare with me. I am master of the water and lord of this shallow well. What more can a fellow ask? Why don't you come here more often to have a good time?"

Before the turtle from the Eastern Ocean could get his left foot into the well, however, he caught his right claw on something. So he halted and stepped back, then began to describe the ocean to the frog.

"It's more than a thousand li across and more than ten thousand feet deep. In ancient times there were floods nine years out of ten yet the water in the ocean never increased. And later there were droughts seven years out of eight yet the water in the ocean never grew less. It has remained quite constant throughout the ages. That is why I like to live in the Eastern Ocean."

Then the frog in the shallow well was silent and felt a little abashed.

Chuang Tzu

THE CARP IN THE DRY RUT

WHEN Chuang Tzu had no money, he went to the Lord Keeper of the River to borrow some grain.

"That's all right," said the lord. "I shall soon have collected the taxes from my fief; then I'll lend you three hundred gold pieces. How about that?"

Very indignant, Chuang Tzu told him this story:

As I was coming here yesterday I heard a voice calling me, and looking round I saw a carp lying in a dry rut on the road.

"How did you get there, carp?" I asked.

"I am a native of the Eastern Ocean," he replied. "Do you have a barrel of water to save my life?"

"That's all right," I told him. "I shall soon be visiting the princes of Wu and Yueh in the south, and I shall let through some water for you from the West River. How about that?"

The carp was most indignant.

"I am out of my usual element," he said, "and don't know what to do. One barrel of water would save me, but you give me nothing but empty promises. You'll have to look for me later in the fish market."

Chuang Tzu

THREE CHESTNUTS OR FOUR

A MONKEY-TRAINER in the state of Sung was fond of monkeys and kept a great many of them. He was able to understand them and they him. Indeed, he used to save some of his family's food for them. But a time came when there was not much food left at home, and he wanted to cut down the monkeys' rations. He feared, however, they might not agree to this, and decided to deceive them.

"I'll give you three chestnuts each morning and four each evening," he said. "Will that be enough?"



All the monkeys rose up to express their anger.

"Well, what about four in the morning and three in the evening?" he asked.

Then the monkeys squatted down again, feeling quite satisfied.

Lieh Tzu*

SUSPICION

A MAN who lost his axe suspected his neighbour's son of stealing it. He watched the way the lad walked — exactly like a thief. He watched the boy's expression — it was that of a thief. He watched the way he talked — just like a thief. In short, all his gestures and actions proclaimed him guilty of theft.

But later he found his axe himself when he went out to dig. And after that, when he saw his neighbour's son, all the lad's gestures and actions looked quite unlike those of a thief.

Lieh Tzu

*A book attributed to Lieh Tzu (Lieh Yü-kou), who lived some time between the seventh and the fifth century B.C. Most of this work, however, was written by later authors.

FELLING THE PLANE TREE

A MAN had a withered plane tree.

"It's unlucky to keep a withered tree," said his neighbour.

But when the first man had felled the tree, his neighbour asked him for some of the wood as fuel.

"The old man simply wanted some fuel," thought the owner of the tree indignantly. "That's why he told me to fell my tree. We are neighbours, and yet he tricks me in this way — this is really going too far!"

Lieh Tzu

HOW THE FOOL MOVED MOUNTAINS

TAIHANG and Wangwu Mountains are some seven hundred li around, and hundreds of thousands of feet high.

North of these mountains lived an old man of nearly ninety, who was called the Fool. His house faced these mountains, and he found it very inconvenient to have to make a detour each time he went out and came back; so one day he summoned his family to discuss the matter.

"Suppose we work together to level the mountains?" he suggested. "Then we can open a road southward to the bank of the Han River."

To this they all agreed. Only his wife was dubious.

"You haven't the strength to level even a small hill," she objected. "How can you move these two mountains? Besides, where will you dump all the earth and rocks?"

"We'll dump them in the sea," was the reply.

Then the Fool set out with his son and grandson, the three of them carrying poles. They dug up stones and earth, and carried them in baskets to the sea. A neighbour of theirs named Ching was a widow with a son of seven or eight, and this boy went with them to help them. It took them several months to make one trip.

A man living at the river bend, who was called the Wise Man, laughed at their efforts and did his best to stop them.

"Enough of this folly!" he cried. "How stupid this is! Old and weak as you are, you won't be able to remove even a fraction of the mountains. How can you dispose of so much earth and stones?"

The Fool heaved a long sigh.

"How dull and dense you are!" he said. "You haven't even the sense of the widow's young son. Though I shall die, I shall leave behind me my son, and my son's sons, and so on from generation to generation. Since these mountains can't grow any larger, why shouldn't we be able to level them?"

Then the Wise Man had nothing to say.

Lieh Tzu

THE TITLE-DEED LOST ON THE ROAD

A MAN of the state of Sung was strolling along the road when he came across an abandoned title-deed. He took it home and hid it, and used to count the items on the deed in secret.

"I am going to be rich," he told a neighbour.

Lieh Tzu

THE MAN WHO SAW NOBODY

THERE was a man in the state of Chi who wanted some gold. One morning he dressed himself smartly and went to the market. Arrived at the gold-dealer's stall, he seized a piece of gold and made off.

The officer who caught him asked him: "Why did you steal gold in front of so many people?"

"When I took the gold," he answered, "I saw nobody. All I saw was the gold."

Lieh Tzu

The above two fables have been translated by Wang Ching-chih.

PRESENTING DOVES

IT was the custom in Hantan to catch doves to present to the prince on New Year's Day, for this pleased him so much that he gave rich rewards. Someone asked the prince the reason for this custom.

"I free the doves at New Year to show my kindness," he said.



"Since your subjects know you want doves to set free, they all set about catching them," objected the other. "And the result is that many doves are killed. If you really want to save the doves, you had better forbid people to catch them. As things are, you catch them to free them, and your kindness cannot make up for the damage you do."

The prince agreed with him.

Lieh Tzu

TOO MANY PATHS

ONE of Yang Tzu's neighbours, who lost a sheep, sent all his men out to find it, and asked Yang Tzu's servant to join in the search.

"What!" exclaimed Yang Tzu. "Do you need all those men to find one sheep?"

"There are so many paths it may have taken," the neighbour explained. When his servant returned, Yang Tzu asked him: "Well, did you find the sheep?"

He answered that they had not. Then Yang Tzu asked how they had failed to find it.

"There are too many paths," replied the servant. "One path leads to another, and we didn't know which to take, so we had to come back."

At that Yang Tzu looked very thoughtful. He was silent for a long time, and did not smile all day.

His pupils were surprised.

"A sheep is a trifle," they said, "and this wasn't even yours. Why should you stop talking and smiling?"

Yang Tzu did not answer, and his pupils were puzzled. One of them, Meng-sun Yang, went out to describe what had happened to Hsin-tu Tzu.

“When there are too many paths,” said Hsin-tu Tzu, “a man cannot find his sheep. When a student has too many interests, he fritters away his time. The source of all knowledge is one, but the branches of learning are many. Only by returning to the primal truth can a man avoid losing his way. You are Yang Tzu’s pupil and study from him, yet you seem to have failed completely to understand him.”

Lieh Tzu

THE PRINCE AND HIS BOW

PRINCE Hsuan was a keen archer and liked to be told what a powerful bowman he was, although he could draw no bow heavier than thirty catties. When he showed his bow to his attendants, they pretended to try to draw it, but merely bent it to half its full extent.

"This must weigh at least ninety catties!" they all cried. "None but Your Majesty could use such a bow."

And at this the prince was pleased.

Though he only used a thirty-catty bow, till the end of his life he believed that it weighed ninety catties. It was thirty in fact, and ninety merely in name; but for the sake of the empty name he sacrificed the truth.

Yin Wen Tzu*

* The works of Yin Wen, of the fourth or third century B.C.

PAINTING GHOSTS

THERE was an artist who worked for the prince of Chi.
“Tell me,” said the prince, “what are the hardest things to paint?”

“Dogs, horses, and the like,” replied the artist.

“What are the easiest?” asked the prince.

“Ghosts and monsters,” the artist told him. “We all know dogs and horses and see them every day; but it is hard to make an exact likeness of them. That is why they are difficult subjects. But ghosts and monsters have no definite form, and no one has ever seen them; so they are easy to paint.”

Han Fei Tzu*

IVORY CHOPSTICKS

WHEN King Chou ordered chopsticks made of ivory, Chi Tzu was most perturbed. For he feared that once the king had ivory chopsticks he would not be content with earthenware, but would want cups of rhinoceros horn and

*A book attributed to Han Fei (?-233 B.C.), part of which was probably compiled by his pupils.

jade; and instead of beans and vegetables, he would insist on such delicacies as elephant's tail and baby leopard. He would hardly be willing either to wear rough homespun or live under a thatched roof, but would demand silks and splendid mansions.

"It is fear of what this will lead to," said Chi Tzu, "that upsets me."

Five years later, indeed, King Chou had a garden filled with meat, tortured his subjects with hot irons, and caroused in a lake of wine. And so he lost his kingdom.

Han Fei Tzu

THE DOG WHO SOURED WINE

THERE was a brewer in the state of Sung whose wine was excellent. He gave fair measure, was civil to his customers, and had his sign up in a most conspicuous place. Yet he could not sell his wine, which was said to be sour. He asked Yang Chien, an elder whom he knew well, what was the reason for this.

"Is your dog fierce?" asked Yang Chien.

"As a matter of fact, it is," replied the brewer. "But what has that to do with my wine not selling?"

"People are afraid of your dog. When a boy is sent with money and a pot to buy your wine, the dog rushes out to bite him. That is why your wine turns sour and will not sell."

Han Fei Tzu

WHY TSENG SHEN KILLED THE PIG

ONE day, when Tseng Shen's wife was going to the market, their son cried and clamoured to go with her.

"Go back now!" she wheedled him. "When I get home we'll kill the pig for you."

Upon her return, she found Tseng Shen about to kill the pig. She hastily stopped him.

"I didn't really mean it," she protested. "I just said that to keep the boy quiet."

"How can you deceive a child like that?" asked Tseng Shen. "Children know nothing to begin with, but they copy their parents and learn from them. When you cheat the boy, you are teaching him to lie. If a mother deceives her child, he will not trust her, and that is no way to bring him up."

So he killed the pig after all.

Han Fei Tzu



THE MAN WHO PRETENDED HE COULD PLAY REED PIPES

WHEN Prince Hsuan of Chi called for reed pipe music, he would have three hundred men playing at the same time. Then a scholar named Nan-kuo asked for a place in the orchestra, and the prince, taking a fancy to him, gave him a salary large enough to feed several hundred men.

After Prince Hsuan's death, however, Prince Min came to the throne, and he liked solo performances.

Thereupon the scholar fled.

Han Fei Tzu

THE MAN WHO SOLD SPEARS AND SHIELDS

IN the state of Chu lived a man who sold shields and spears.

"My shields are so strong," he boasted, "that nothing can pierce them. My spears are so sharp there is nothing they cannot pierce."

"What if one of your spears strikes one of your shields?" someone asked him.

The man had no answer to that.

Han Fei Tzu

THE CRUMBLING WALL

THERE was once a rich man in the state of Sung. After a downpour of rain his wall began to crumble.

"If you don't mend that wall," warned his son, "a thief will get in."

An old neighbour gave the same advice.

That night, indeed, a great deal of money was stolen. Then the rich man commended his son's intelligence, but suspected his old neighbour of being the thief.

Han Fei Tzu

A RECIPE FOR IMMORTALITY

A STRANGER informed the Prince of Yen that he could make him immortal, and the prince bade one of his subjects learn this art; but before the man could do so the stranger died. Then the prince, in great anger, executed his subject.

He failed to see that the stranger was cheating him, but taken in by his lies had an innocent citizen killed. This shows what a fool he was! For a man values nothing more than his own life, yet this fellow could not even keep himself alive, so what could he do for the prince?

Han Fei Tzu

WAITING FOR A HARE TO TURN UP

THERE was a peasant in the state of Sung. One day a hare dashed up, knocked against a tree in his field, broke its neck and fell dead. Then the peasant put down his hoe and waited by the tree for another hare to turn up. No more hares appeared, however; but he became the laughing-stock of the state.

Han Fei Tzu



BUYING A PAIR OF SHOES

A MAN in the state of Cheng decided to buy some new shoes. He measured his feet but left the measure on his seat, and went to the market without it. There he found a shoemaker.

"Why, I forgot to bring the measurement!" he cried.

He hurried home to fetch it.

By the time he got back to the market, the fair was over; so he failed to buy his shoes.

"Why didn't you try the shoes on?" asked one of his neighbours.

"I trust the ruler more," was his reply.

Han Fei Tzu

SELLING THE CASKET WITHOUT THE PEARLS

A NATIVE of the state of Chu decided to sell some pearls in the state of Cheng. He had a casket made of rare wood, scented it with spices, inlaid it with jade and other precious jewels, and wrapped it in kingfishers' plumage. The result was that the men of Cheng were eager to buy the casket, but he could not sell his pearls.

This fellow may be considered a skilled casket seller, but deserves no credit at all as a seller of pearls.

Han Fei Tzu

HOW TWO WATER SNAKES MOVED HOUSE

THE snakes wanted to move away from a marsh which was drying up.

"If you lead the way and I follow," said a small to a large snake, "men will know we are moving away and someone will kill you. You had better carry me on your back, each holding the other's tail in his mouth. Then men will think I am a god."

So, each holding the other, they crossed the highway. And everybody made way for them, crying out: "This is a god!"

Han Fei Tzu

THE BOW AND THE ARROW

ONE man boasted, "My bow is so good, it needs no arrow."

Another man boasted, "My arrow is so good, it needs no bow."

The skilled archer Yi heard them and said, "Without a bow, how can you shoot an arrow? And without an arrow how can you hit the target?"

So the bow and the arrow were used together, and Yi taught these men to shoot.

Han Fei Tzu

THE CONCEITED COACHMAN

ONE day Yen Tzu, prime minister of the state of Chi, went out in his carriage. His coachman's wife, from her gate, saw her husband looking thoroughly smug and conceited under the great carriage awning as he drove his four horses.

When the coachman went home, his wife told him she wanted to leave him.

Her husband asked her why.

"Yen Tzu is prime minister of Chi," she replied. "He is famed throughout the states. But I saw him out today, deep in thought and not giving himself any airs. You are only a coachman, yet you look so conceited and pleased with yourself. That's why I want to leave you."

After this, her husband behaved more modestly. When Yen Tzu, surprised, inquired the reason for this change, the coachman told him the truth. Then Yen Tzu recommended him for an official post.

Yen Tzu*

*A work attributed to Yen Tzu (Yen Ying), who lived some time between the seventh and the fifth century B.C. Parts of this book were written considerably later.

THE LORD WHO LOVED DRAGONS

LORD Yeh was so fond of dragons that he had them painted and carved all over his house. When the real dragon in heaven heard about this, it flew down and put its head through Lord Yeh's door and its tail through one of his windows. When the lord saw this he fled, frightened nearly out of his wits.

This shows that the lord was not really fond of dragons. He liked all that looked like dragons, but not the genuine thing.

Shen Tzu*

* The works of Shen Pu-hai (?-337 B.C.).

THE CHICKEN THIEF

THERE was a man who used to steal a chicken from his neighbours every day.

“It is wrong to steal,” someone told him.

“I’ll cut down on it,” promised the chicken thief. “I shall steal one chicken a month from now on, and stop altogether next year.”

Since he knew he was wrong, he ought to have stopped at once. Why wait for another year?

Mencius*

HELPING YOUNG SHOOTS TO GROW

A MAN in the state of Sung felt the shoots in his fields were not growing fast enough. So he pulled them all up, then went home quite exhausted.

“I’m tired out today,” he told his family. “I’ve been helping the young shoots to grow.”

His son ran out to the fields to have a look, and found all their seedlings were dead.

Most people would like to help young shoots to grow; but some think all efforts useless and make no attempt, not even weeding the fields; others try to help the shoots grow by pulling them up. This, of course, is worse than useless.

Mencius

*The works of Mencius (Meng Ko, 372-289 B.C.).

LEARNING TO PLAY DRAUGHTS

PLAYING draughts is a minor art; yet even so, you must give your whole attention to it to learn it. Chiu, the best draughts-player in the country, had two pupils. One of them concentrated entirely on what Chiu told them, while the other, though he also listened to his master, was thinking all the time of the wild geese in the sky, and itching to get his bow and arrows to shoot them. So he did not learn as well as the other pupil. It was not because he was less intelligent.

Mencius



THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN FIFTY YARDS AND A HUNDRED

"I HAVE done my best for the state," Prince Huei of Liang told Mencius. "When the crops fail west of the river, I move the people east or bring grain from the east to relieve them. If the crops are poor in the east, I do the same. When I look at the rulers of other states, none of them does so much for his people as I do; yet their populations have not decreased, while mine has not increased. Can you tell me why?"

"Since Your Majesty loves fighting," answered Mencius, "let me take an example from that. Once the drums sound, the troops engage the enemy. Then those who are defeated abandon their armour and fly, trailing their weapons behind them. Suppose one man runs a hundred yards and another man fifty, is the one who has fled only fifty right to laugh at the one who has fled a hundred?"

"Of course not," replied Prince Huei. "He may not have gone a hundred yards, but he has turned tail just the same."

"If Your Majesty understands this," responded Mencius, "you should not expect your population to be greater than that of any of the neighbouring states."

Mencius

THE SNIPE AND THE MUSSEL

A MUSSEL was opening its shell to bask in the sun when a snipe pecked at it. The mussel clamped down on the bird's beak, and held it fast.

"If it doesn't rain today or tomorrow," said the snipe, "there will be a dead mussel lying here."

"If you can't prize loose today or tomorrow," retorted the mussel, "there will be a dead snipe here too."

As neither of them would give way, a passing fisherman caught them both.

Warring States Anecdotes*

* Compiled by Liu Hsiang (78-6 B.C.).



THE FOX WHO PROFITED BY THE TIGER'S MIGHT

WHILE hunting for prey, the tiger caught a fox.

"You can't eat *me*," said the fox. "The Emperor of Heaven has appointed me king of the beasts. If you eat me, you'll be disobeying his orders. If you don't believe me, follow me. You'll soon see whether the other animals run away at the sight of me or not."

Agreeing to this, the tiger accompanied him; and when all the beasts saw them coming they dashed away. Not realizing that they were afraid of him, the tiger thought they were afraid of the fox.

Warring States Anecdotes

THE RUMOUR ABOUT TSENG SHEN

ONCE, when Tseng Shen went to the district of Fei, a man with the same name there committed a murder. Someone went to tell Tseng Shen's mother: "Tseng Shen has killed a man!"

"Impossible," she replied. "My son would never do such a thing."

She went calmly on with her weaving.

After a while, someone else came to report: "Tseng Shen has killed a man."

Still the old lady went on weaving.

Then a third man came to tell her: "Tseng Shen has killed a man!"

This time his mother was frightened. She threw down her shuttle and escaped over the wall.

For although Tseng Shen was a good man and his mother trusted him, when three men accused him of murder, much as she loved him she could not but begin to doubt him.

Warring States Anecdotes

THE WRONG DIRECTION

THE Prince of Wei decided to invade Hantan, the capital of the state of Chao. Although Chi-liang was on a journey when he heard this, he turned back at once and, without waiting to smooth his crumpled garments or brush the dust from his head, went to see the king.

"On my way back," he said, "I came across a man at Taihang Mountain, who was riding northwards. He told me he was going to the state of Chu.

"In that case, why are you heading north?" I asked him.

"That's all right," he replied. "I have good horses."

"Your horses may be good, but you're taking the wrong direction."

"Well, I have plenty of money."

"You may have plenty of money, but this is the wrong direction."

"Well, I have an excellent charioteer."

"The better your horses," I told him, "the more money you have and the more skilled your charioteer, the further you will get from the state of Chu."

Warring States Anecdotes

DRAWING A SNAKE WITH LEGS

IN the state of Chu, a man who had held a sacrifice gave the goblet of sacrificial wine to his stewards.

"This is not enough for us all," said the stewards, "but more than enough for one. Let's draw snakes on the ground, and the one who finished first can have the wine."

The man who finished first picked up the goblet, but holding it in his left hand went on drawing with his right.

"I am adding some legs," he said.

Before he finished the legs, though, another steward completed his drawing and took the goblet from him.

"A snake has no legs," said this last. "Why should you add legs?"

So he drained the wine instead. And the one who had drawn the legs had nothing to drink.

Warring States Anecdotes



BORROWING THE LIGHT

A GIRL in one of the workshops by the river was too poor to buy oil for the lamp; so the other girls decided to drive her away. As the poor girl was leaving she said to the others:

"Because I couldn't afford to pay for the light, I always arrived first to sweep the room and put down the mats. Your light shines on all four walls: why grudge me a share in it? It doesn't hurt you to let me borrow your light, and I make myself useful to you. Why should you drive me away?"

Realizing the truth of what she said, they let her stay after all.

Warring States Anecdotes

WHICH WAS THE MORE HANDSOME

LORD Tsou Chi of the state of Chi was six feet tall and a fine figure of a man. One morning he dressed himself smartly, and studied himself in the mirror.

"Which is more handsome," he asked his wife, "Lord Hsu of the north city or I?"

"You are ever so handsome," replied his wife. "How can Lord Hsu compare with you?"

Since Lord Hsu of the north city was famed for his good looks throughout the state, Tsou Chi did not altogether believe his wife. He repeated his question to his concubine.

"How can Lord Hsu compare with you?" cried the concubine.

Later that morning a protégé came in, and Tsou Chi put the same question to him.

"You are by far the more handsome," replied this man.

The next day Lord Hsu called, and a careful scrutiny convinced Tsou Chi that Hsu's good looks far surpassed his. He studied himself in the mirror, and undoubtedly he was the plainer of the two.

That night in bed he reached the following conclusion: "My wife said I was more handsome because she is biased. My concubine said so because she is afraid. And my protégé said so because he wants something from me!"

Warring States Anecdotes

BUYING A GOOD HORSE

THERE was a king who was willing to pay a thousand pieces of gold for a horse that could run a thousand li without stopping. For three years he tried in vain to find such a steed.

Then someone offered: "Let me look for a horse for Your Majesty."

The king agreed to this.

After three months this man came back, having spent five hundred pieces of gold on a horse's skull.

The king was most enraged.

"I want a live horse!" he roared. "What use is a dead horse to me? Why spend five hundred pieces of gold on nothing?"

But the man replied: "If you will spend five hundred pieces of gold on a dead horse, won't you give much more for a live one? When people hear of this, they will know you are really willing to pay for a good horse, and will quickly send you their best."

Sure enough, in less than a year the king succeeded in buying three excellent horses.

Warring States Anecdotes

THE CLAY FIGURE AND THE WOODEN IMAGE

WHEN Lord Meng-chang decided to leave his native land — the state of Chi — to take office in the state of Chin, hundreds of men tried to dissuade him from going. But he would not listen to them. Then Su Chin, the rhetorician, wanted to reason with him.

"I have heard all the arguments men can think of," said Lord Meng-chang. "All that's lacking is some supernatural reasoning."

"I came here with no intention of discussing human affairs," replied Su Chin. "I am asking for an audience to speak of the supernatural."

Then the lord admitted him, and Su Chin told the following story:

"Passing the River Tzu on my way here, I heard a clay figure and a peach-wood image talking together.

" 'You used to be a piece of clay on the west bank,' jeered the wooden image. 'Now you have been made into a figure. But during the big rains in the eighth month, when the river rises, you are sure to be destroyed.'"

“ ‘What of it?’ retorted the clay figure. ‘I come from the west bank, and when I am destroyed I shall become part of it again. But you are made of peach wood from the east country, carved into an image. When the great rains come and the river rises, you will be swept away, and then what will you do?’

“The state of Chin has strong passes on every side, so to enter it is like entering a tiger’s mouth! Once you go to Chin, I fear you will never come back.”

Then the lord gave up his plan.

Warring States Anecdotes



MARKING THE BOAT TO LOCATE THE SWORD

A MAN of the state of Chu was ferrying across a river when his sword fell into the water. He lost no time in marking the side of the boat.

"This is where my sword dropped," he said.

When the boat moored, he got into the water to look for his sword by the place which he had marked. But since the boat had moved while the sword had not, this method of locating his sword proved unsuccessful.

The Discourses of Lü Pu-wei (Lü Shih Chun Chiu)*

STEALING THE BELL

AFTER the fall of the house of Fan, a man got hold of a bronze bell. It was too big to carry away on his back, and when he tried to break it with a hammer it made such a din that he feared others might hear and take it away from him. So he hastily stopped his ears.

It was all right to worry about others hearing the noise, but foolish to stop his own ears.

The Discourses of Lü Pu-wei

* A work attributed to Lü Pu-wei (?-235 B.C.), most of which was written by his protégés.

THE SON OF A GOOD SWIMMER

A MAN walking along the river bank saw someone about to throw a small boy into the water. The child was screaming with terror.

“Why do you want to throw that child into the river?” asked the passer-by.

“His father is a good swimmer,” was the answer.

But it does not follow that the son of a good swimmer can swim.

The Discourses of Lü Pu-wei

PUNISHING THE HORSE

BECAUSE his horse refused to advance, a traveller in the state of Sung drove it into a stream, then mounted to set off again. Still the horse refused to go, and he punished it once more in the same way. This happened three times in all. Even the most skilful rider could devise no better means of frightening a horse; but if you are not a rider, simply a bully, your horse will refuse to carry you.

The Discourses of Lü Pu-wei

THE CLEVER OLD WOMAN

AN old woman was friendly with a young wife, whose mother-in-law suspected her of stealing some meat and wanted to drive her away. In despair she went to complain to the old woman.

"Where can you go?" demanded her old neighbour. "I shall get your mother-in-law to call you back."

Then she took a bundle of straw to the house where the young woman lived.

"My dogs are fighting over some stolen meat," she said. "So I want to light a fire to give them a beating."

As soon as the mother-in-law heard that, she sent to recall her daughter-in-law.

This old woman was not gifted with eloquence, and taking a bundle of straw to ask for a light is not the usual means of effecting a reconciliation; but when you do the right thing you achieve results.

Han Ying's Commentary on the Book of Songs*

* A work of the third or the second century B.C.

LAMENTING A MOTHER'S DEATH

THE mother of a man living in the east of a village died, and he lamented her death: but he did not sound too sad. When the son of a woman living in the west of the village saw this, he went home and said to his mother: "Why don't you hurry up and die? I promised to lament you very bitterly."

A man who looks forward to his mother's death will hardly be able to lament it bitterly.

Huai Nan Tzu*

THE BLIND MAN AND THE LAME MAN

A CERTAIN country was invaded by its enemy. When a lame man there told a blind man of this, the blind man carried the lame one on his back and they escaped together. They did this by making use of each other's strong points.

Huai Nan Tzu

* A work written largely by the protégés of Liu An, the prince of Huai Nan, who lived during the second and the first century B.C.

WHO DESERVED THE PLACE OF HONOUR

A MAN passing a friend's house noticed that the kitchen chimney was straight, and a pile of fuel was stacked beside the stove.

"You had better build another chimney with a bend in it," he advised the householder. "And move that fuel away, otherwise it may catch fire."



But the master of the house ignored his advice.

Later the house did catch fire; but luckily the neighbours came and helped to put it out. Then that family killed an ox and prepared wine to express their thanks to the neighbours. Those who had received burns were seated in the places of honour, and the rest according to their merit; but no mention was made of the man who had advised them to build a new chimney.

"If you had taken that man's advice," someone said to the master of the house, "you could have saved the expense of the ox and wine, and avoided a fire. Now you are entertaining your friends to thank them for what they did. But is it right to ignore the man who advised you to rebuild the chimney and move the firewood, while you treat those who received burns as guests of honour?"

Then the master of the house realized his mistake, and invited the man who had given him good advice.

The Han Dynasty History*

* By Fan Ku (32-92 A.D.).

THE OWL MOVES HOUSE

ONE day the owl met the turtle-dove.

"Where are you going?" inquired the dove.

"I am moving east," said the owl.

"Why is that?" asked the dove.

"All the people here dislike my hoot," replied the owl.

"That is why I want to move east."

"If you can change your voice," said the dove, "then it will be all right. But if you can't, even if you move east, the people there will dislike you just the same."

The Garden of Anecdotes (Shuo Yuan)*

THE USE OF PARABLES

"HUEI Tzu is for ever using parables," complained someone to the Prince of Liang. "If you, sire, forbid him to speak in parables, he won't be able to make his meaning clear."

The prince agreed with this man.

The next day the prince saw Huei Tzu.

"From now on," he said, "kindly talk in a straightforward manner, and not in parables."

"Suppose there were a man who did not know what a catapult is," replied Huei Tzu. "If he asked you what it

* By Liu Hsiang.

looked like, and you told him it looked just like a catapult, would he understand what you meant?"

"Of course not," answered the prince.

"But suppose you told him that a catapult looks something like a bow and that it is made of bamboo—wouldn't he understand you better?"

"Yes, that would be clearer," admitted the prince.

"We compare something a man does not know with something he does know in order to help him to understand it," said Huei Tzu. "If you won't let me use parables, how can I make things clear to you?"

The prince agreed that he was right.

The Garden of Anecdotes

A PARABLE ON STUDY

"**I** AM seventy already," said Duke Ping of Tsin to his blind musician Shih Kuang. "Though I want very much to study and read some books, I feel it is too late."

"But why not light the candle?" suggested Shih Kuang.

"How dare a subject joke with his master?" cried the duke angrily.

"A blind musician, I dare not!" protested Shih Kuang. "But I have heard that if a man is fond of study in his youth, his future is as bright as the morning sun; if he applies himself to study in middle age, it is like the noon-day sun; while if he begins to study when he is old, it is like a candle's flame. Though a candle is not very bright, at least it is better than groping in the dark."

The duke agreed with him.

The Garden of Anecdotes

THE CICADA, THE PRAYING MANTIS AND THE SPARROW

THE Prince of Wu decided to attack the state of Chu. He gave a stern warning to his subjects that anyone who raised objections would be put to death.

One of his stewards wanted to protest, but dared not. Instead, he took a catapult and pellets and wandered in the back courtyard until his clothes were wet with dew. He did this for three mornings.

"Come here," ordered the prince. "What are you doing to make your clothes wet with dew?"

"There is a tree in the garden," replied the steward, "and on it there is a cicada. This cicada perches up there, chirping away and drinking the dew, not knowing that there is a praying mantis behind it. And the praying mantis leans forward, raising its forelegs to catch the cicada, not knowing that there is a sparrow beside it. The sparrow, again, cranes its neck to peck at the praying mantis, not knowing that there is someone with a catapult waiting below. These three small creatures are so eager to profit by something directly in front of them that they fail to realize the danger behind."

"Well said," replied the prince, and he gave up his plan of invasion.

The Garden of Anecdotes

THE DRAGON WHO CHANGED INTO A FISH

ONCE the white dragon went down from heaven to a cool lake, taking the form of a fish. Then a fisherman named Yu-tsu shot at him and pierced him in the eye. The white dragon flew up at once to complain to the Emperor of Heaven.

“What form had you assumed at the time?” asked the Emperor of Heaven.

“I took the form of a fish when I went down to the lake.”

“Then of course a fisherman would try to catch you. How can you blame Yu-tsu?”

The Garden of Anecdotes

ON WEARING ARMOUR

ONE day Tien Tsan went into the presence of the Prince of Chu in rags.

"You are very shabbily dressed, sir," remarked the prince.

"There are worse clothes than these," replied Tien Tsan.

"What may they be, pray?"

"Armour is worse."

"What do you mean by that?"

"It is cold in winter and hot in summer; so no clothes are worse than armour. Since I am a poor man, my clothes are naturally shabby; but you are a prince with ten thousand chariots and untold wealth, yet you like to dress men in armour. This is something I cannot understand. Perhaps you are bent on fame? But armour is used in war, when men's heads are hacked off, their bodies pierced, their cities razed to the ground, and their parents and children tortured—the mere name is rather inglorious. Or perhaps you are bent on gain? But if you try to injure others, others will try to injure you; and if you endanger their lives, they will endanger yours. Thus you will gain nothing but trouble for your own men. If I were you, I would not wage war for either."

The Prince of Chu had nothing to say to that.

New Discourses (Hsin Hsu)*

* By Liu Hsiang.

THE FUR AND THE HIDE

WHILE on a tour of the country, Marquis Wen of the state of Wei saw a man wearing a fur with the hide outside, carrying a bundle of straw.

“Why wear your fur inside out to carry straw?” asked the marquis.

“To protect the fur,” was the answer.

“Don’t you realize, man,” said the marquis, “that when the hide wears out, the fur will go too?”

New Discourses

THE REFLECTION OF THE BOW

MY grandfather, who was magistrate of the district of Chi, once invited his secretary, Tu Hsuan, to drink with him during the midsummer festival. A red bow which was hanging on the north wall cast a reflection in the cup just like a snake; but although Tu Hsuan was frightened he dared not refuse to drink. Then he had a severe pain in his stomach, and could not eat, so that he grew very thin. Though he tried all manner of drugs, he could find no cure.



Later my grandfather called on him on some business, and asked him how he had contracted this illness.

"Through fear of the snake which I swallowed," Tu Hsuan told him.

After going home my grandfather thought this over, then turned and saw the bow, and understood what had happened. He sent a subordinate with a carriage to escort Tu Hsuan to his house, and set wine in the same place, so that once more a snake appeared in the cup.

"This is simply a reflection of that bow on the wall," he told his secretary.

At once Tu Hsuan felt better and, greatly relieved, recovered.

Traditional Topics (Feng Su Tung)*

* By Ying Shao who lived between the second and the third century A.D.

THE PIG WITH THE WHITE HEAD

ONCE in Liaotung a swineherd's sow farrowed a piglet with white head, and thinking it a prodigy he decided to present it to the court. When he reached Hotung, however, he found that all the pigs there had white heads; so he went sheepishly home.

The Later Han History*

*By Fan Yeh (398-445 A.D.).



THE HOLY EEL

AT Stone Pavilion Dam in Kuaichi there stands a great maple tree. The trunk has rotted and is hollow; so whenever it rains, a hole in the tree becomes filled with water. A merchant passing here with a load of eels put one eel in the rotten tree for fun.

Since eels do not grow on trees, when the villagers saw it they were sure it must be holy. They built a temple by the tree, slaughtered cattle to sacrifice every day, and called the place The Temple of Father Eel. They believed that those who prayed at the shrine would immediately have good fortune, while those who offended the god would be overtaken by calamity.

When the merchant came back this way and saw what had happened, he took the eel to make eel broth. And so it ceased being holy.

• **The Garden of Marvels (Yi Yuan)***

* By Liu Ching-shu of the fifth century A.D.

